

Research Design

The strength of qualitative research is that it can be used to identify specific areas of investigation that may have not been considered previously, or issues of concern to specific populations. Qualitative research may also be used to “frame” issues — that is, investigate ways to approach issues — or explore ways to word survey questions. It can also be used to further explore quantitative data.

It is important to recognize that results obtained from qualitative research *cannot* be generalized to a larger population, because qualitative research does not produce statistically significant and projectable findings. It is important that qualitative data not be misinterpreted or misrepresented in quantitative terms. For example, the statement “9 of the 12 participants interviewed” should not be interpreted as meaning “75% of the population,” because this would incorrectly indicate that the 12 participants who were interviewed represented a statistically accurate sample. Any findings from qualitative research should be validated if needed using quantitative methods.

Qualitative research methodologies share certain elements:

- # a trained moderator;
- # specific recruitment of study participants who qualify, based on detailed screening criteria; and
- # a discussion guide designed to obtain the answers to the key research questions.

The qualitative research for Phase II of the CLI was designed to find out more about how consumers respond to various types of information and formats presented on the labels of outdoor pesticides, household cleaners, and indoor insecticides, and to probe in more depth some of the information received from the written surveys. The research design consisted of a series of “mini” focus groups with users of outdoor pesticides, household cleaners, and indoor insecticides. The mini focus group format (three to five participants) was thought to be the most useful for gaining a more in-depth understanding of consumers’ reaction to a variety of label designs. The mini focus group environment allows for greater participation by each respondent than does a larger focus group (usually about eight to ten people). A small focus group also allows people to ask questions of each other and have more free-flowing discussions. The Qualitative Subgroup felt that the CLI could learn more from this type of discussion than from a question-and-answer or one-on-one interview format.

Recruitment Criteria

Only product users were included in this study, to ensure that group participants would have some baseline familiarity with product labels. This knowledge could be used as a benchmark to probe participants’ understanding of and reaction to the labels presented during the groups. A decision to include non-users would have introduced too much variability into the study design.

Three cities were selected for the research: Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Dallas, TX; and Chicago, IL. These locations are known to have a large insect population that affects consumers, and therefore

many consumers in these areas purchase and use indoor insecticides and outdoor pesticides. This large consumer base was expected to make selection of group participants easier.

Participants were recruited by telephone, using a recruitment screening questionnaire that clearly identified them as product users for one of the three selected product categories. (The recruitment screening questionnaires are reproduced in Appendix 3-1.) Recruiting specifications for each product category follow:

Mini Focus Groups to Discuss Outdoor House and Garden Pesticides

Men and women who were most responsible for the purchase and usage of outdoor house and garden pesticides were recruited for these groups. Qualified respondents had purchased an outdoor house and garden pesticide at least once in the past six months, and had used the purchased pesticide at least once. These people were treating a broad range of insect types (e.g., the Florida groups included some people who were treating fire ants). A few people who used weed-and-feed combination products (fertilizer and insecticide) were included. People were recruited to represent a variety of demographics (age, work status, home owner/renter, occupation, and gender, within each mini-group). All professional lawn service providers, exterminators, and farmers were excluded from these groups, so as not to bias the responses of the other participants, since these groups receive specific training on these types of products..

Mini Focus Groups to Discuss Indoor Insecticides

Men and women who were most responsible for the purchase of indoor insecticides for their household were recruited for the mini focus groups on indoor insecticides. Qualified respondents had seen ants, roaches, or fleas in their residence, had purchased an indoor insecticide at least once in the past six months, and had used the insecticide purchased at least once. People representing a variety of demographics (age, work status, home owner/renter, occupation, and gender, within each mini-group) were recruited. All professional exterminators were excluded from this research so as not to bias the responses of the other participants.

Mini Focus Groups to Discuss Household Cleaners

Men and women who were most responsible for the purchase and use of household cleaners were recruited for these groups. Qualified respondents had purchased a household hard surface cleaner at least once in the past six months, and had used the product at least once in the past month. People representing a variety of demographics (age, work status, home owner/renter, occupation, and gender, within each mini-group) were recruited. People who worked in professional cleaning services were excluded to prevent any professional bias, based on familiarity or training with the products.

All Groups

Additionally, the recruits for all three types of groups met the following criteria:

- # they had not participated in another focus group within the past six months;
- # they had not personally been employed, or had immediate family employed, in advertising, marketing research, manufacturing, sales, or distributing of indoor insecticides, outdoor pesticides, or household cleaners;

- # they had passed a project articulateness check (see the last question on the recruitment screening questionnaire);
- # they included a mix of responses to the question about whether or not they read labels for the product category discussed;
- # they included a mix of families with and without children;
- # they included a mix of families with and without pets;
- # they included a mix of families who were light or heavy users of the product category; and
- # they included a mix of urban and suburban dwellers.

Development of the Discussion Guides

The Qualitative Subgroup members and The Newman Group, Ltd. jointly developed discussion guides to be used in moderating the mini focus groups. The discussion guides were designed to obtain as much information as possible that would address the seven key learning objectives mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The guides were designed to encourage relatively open-ended conversation, allowing consumers to discuss their actual experiences when reading and using labels. Copies of the discussion guides for each product category appear in Appendix 3-2.

Due to the fluid, qualitative nature of focus group research and to the fact that 27 groups were held, topics sometimes were approached in an order other than that described in Appendix 3-2, or were worded in a slightly different manner. Also, the discussion guides were refined throughout the course of the research, which enabled later groups to discuss new issues and view different ways of expressing concepts on product labels. Not all groups discussed every issue that is mentioned in this chapter.